

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6063
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WALVIS BAY

ANNCR:

THE PORT OF WALVIS BAY HAS BECOME AN ISSUE BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE UNITED NATIONS. VOA'S BOB CHANCELLOR RECENTLY VISITED WALVIS BAY AND SENT THIS REPORT ABOUT THE PALACE.

VOICE:

THE FIRST REACTION WHEN ARRIVING IN WALVIS BAY, IS WHAT IS ALL THE FUSS ABOUT. IT'S A SMALL TOWN OF NO MORE THAN SIX THOUSAND WHITES AND THIRTY THOUSAND BLACKS AND COLOREDS OR MIXED RACE PEOPLE. MOST OF THE STREETS ARE UNPAVED, DUST AND SAND FLOW OFF THE ADJACENT NAMIB DESERT, AND THE STRONG SMELL OF FISH TESTIFIES TO THE PRESENCE OF THE TOWN'S MAJOR INDUSTRY OF FISHING AND FISH PROCESSING.

BUT WHEN THE VISITOR SEES THE HARBOR HE KNOWS IMMEDIATELY WHAT THE FUSS IS ABOUT. WALVIS BAY IS THE ONLY DEEP-WATER PORT ALONG THE SIXTEEN HUNDRED KILOMETER ATLANTIC COAST OF NAMIBIA OR SOUTHWEST AFRICA. POLITICAL GROUPS WHO HOPE TO GOVERN THE FUTURE INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA SAY WALVIS BAY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE NAMIBIAN TERRITORY, AND THE U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL BACKS THEM UP WITH A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR THE RE-INTEGRATION OF THE PORT INTO THE TERRITORY. BUT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT ARGUES, CORRECTLY, THAT WALVIS BAY IS A SEPARATE ENCLAVE WHICH NEVER HAS BEEN A PART OF NAMIBIA, NOT IN GERMAN COLONIAL TIMES NOR DURING SOUTH AFRICA'S TRUSTEESHIP.

THE BAY'S MODERN FULLY EQUIPPED DEEP WATER BERTH IS NEARLY ONE AND A HALF KILOMETERS LONG, AND ABOUT THIRTY CRANES ON TRACKS ARE AVAILABLE TO MOVE ALONG TO ANY POINT ON THE PIER TO

LOAD AND UNLOAD SHIPS. IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, WALVIS BAY HAS BECOME THE FOURTH BUSIEST PORT UNDER SOUTH AFRICAN CONTROL. IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-FIVE, ELEVEN HUNDRED SIXTY-SIX SHIPS CALLED, AND TONNAGE THROUGH THE PORT EXCEEDED ONE AND ONE-HALF MILLION TONS. MOST OF THE EXPORTS FROM WALVIS BAY ARE FISH PRODUCTS AND MINERALS, INCLUDING URANIUM WHICH IS MINED ONLY EIGHTY KILOMETERS AWAY.

WALVIS BAY LIES SCATTERED AMONG THE SAND DUNES WHERE THE DESERT STRETCHES RIGHT DOWN TO THE SEA. IT HAS NONE OF THE CHARM OF THE NEIGHBORING TOWN OF SWAKOPMUND, THIRTY KILOMETERS TO THE NORTH. SWAKOPMUND, WHICH IS IN NAMIBIAN TERRITORY, IS A PICTURESQUE RESORT TOWN WITH DOZENS OF PRESERVED AND RESTORED GERMAN COLONIAL BUILDINGS, A PLEASANT BEACH AND MANY TOURIST ACCOMODATIONS. WALVIS BAY IS REACHED FROM SWAKOPMUND BY A SPECTACULAR DRIVE SOUTH WITH THE ATLANTIC SURF POUNDING ON THE RIGHT AND SOME OF THE WORLD'S HIGHEST SAND DUNES TO THE LEFT. BUT WALVIS BAY IS N O T QUAIN T; IT IS OBVIOUS THAT IT IS A WORKING TOWN.

SOUTH AFRICA SAYS IT IS WILLING TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE USE AND PERHAPS OWNERSHIP OF WALVIS BAY WITH A FRIENDLY GOVERNMENT IN INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA. BUT IT REJECTS THE SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION DEMANDING ITS RE-INTEGRATION.

WALVIS BAY IS AN ISSUE AND A PLACE THAT MOST PEOPLE HAD NEVER HEARD OF A YEAR AGO. IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN PUT ASIDE AS A POINT OF CONTENTION FOR THE MOMENT IN THE INTEREST OF SETTLING NAMIBIA'S FUTURE. BUT THE QUESTION OF WALVIS BAY HAS N O T GONE AWAY.

GH/RCS